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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 000661

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SUBJECT: PART 2 OF 3: SCENESETTER FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S APRIL
22 NATIONAL ELECTION

REF: A. PRETORIA 000543

[1](#)B. PRETORIA 000544

PRETORIA 00000661 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR RAYMOND L. BROWN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) This cable is part 2 of 3 on the South African
election. End Summary.

The Issues That Will Drive Voters

[1](#)2. (C) In the 2006 local elections around the country, the
delivery of services such as water, sanitation, and
electricity was the issue that most motivated voters.
Service delivery remains a key set of issues galvanizing
voters in this election. (Note: In 1994, around eighty
percent of South Africa's population remained outside of the
formal economy. Though significant efforts have been made to
bring them into the economic mainstream and provide essential
infrastructure and services, at least 14 million South
Africans still live on around one dollar per day. End Note.)

However, the public also is voting for faster and more
sustainable job creation, improved education, greater access
to health care, rural development, decreased crime, and the
elimination of corruption. Much has been made of the recent
Afrobarometer public opinion survey that showed that,
compared to three years ago, South Africans trust their
government, state institutions, and political parties less
than they used to. Although many scholars have called the
survey's credibility into question, the results show that
unemployment and service delivery are the two greatest
concerns for South Africans.

[1](#)3. (C) Added to core issues that voters seem to care most
about is the issue of Zuma himself. There are many anecdotal
reports that reveal unease over the ANC President -- his
legal problems, shady friends, polygamous lifestyle, lack of
formal education, etc. -- could cause some voters to turn out
against the former Deputy President. Scholars such as
University of Witwatersrand professor Daryl Glaser,
University of South Africa professor Dirk Kotze, and
University of Witwatersrand sociologist Roger Southall say
that "morality" -- or the perceived lack of Zuma's morality
by many within the public -- will also be an issue that

pushes voters to the polls. COPE's selection of former Methodist Bishop Mvumelwana "Mvume" Dandala as the party's presidential candidate over party president Lekota was a way for the party to capitalize on the morality issue by contrasting Dandala with Zuma.

14. (C) Another element that may push voters to the polls is the "Obama factor." The head of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) Dr. Brigalia Bam and other officials note that the "Obama factor" was at work in South Africa's high voter registration figures this year. Bam said she timed a major voter registration drive to follow U.S. elections in November to gain a bounce in local interest. A further factor that may push voters to the polls, according to the IEC officials and political commentators, is that 2009 is a year of political realignment. The number of registered parties is now 156, the highest ever, but only 41 of them will compete at the national level for Parliament, and the remainder will be limited to provincial contests. The public is exploring political space in a new way, and commentators have commented that fractures in the ANC over the Mbeki vs. Zuma struggle of the past few years may have helped create a sense of possibility. South African young people, many who will be first time voters, are debating political ideas on the basis of self-interest and/or principles and do not feel bound by historical loyalty to the ANC. They added that the older generation, those who remember apartheid harassment and abuse, still associate liberation and post-apartheid benefits with Mandela and the ANC. Even today, the vast majority of ANC grass root support think of the ANC as "Mandela's Party." Also, new media has played a role in this election. The ANC launched for the first time ever television campaign advertisements, and all major political parties have their own websites or are on facebook.com.

PRETORIA 00000661 002.2 OF 002

The Mechanics of the Election

15. (C) The IEC has spent months registering all eligible voters by holding several voter registration weekends and encouraging new voters to register via SMS, Internet, and television campaigns. From all indications, the IEC is ready for this election and has taken steps to ensure that the international community can deem the poll free and fair. The IEC has a budget driven by its own internal estimates which is funded by the Treasury without reference to the President, Parliament, or any other agency. It maintains a headquarters staff as well as provincial offices that answer only to the IEC leadership. Asked about IEC's staffing in the run-up to April 22 elections, IEC Chairperson Brigalia Bam in a recent meeting with the Charge said that IEC staff numbers about 900 with 200-300 based in Pretoria and the remainder in provincial and municipal offices throughout South Africa's nine provinces. She noted that this number will expand to approximately 200,000 on election day in order to staff close to 2,000 polling stations nationwide. Special voting will take place on March 20-21 for disabled voters and others who qualify for early voting. Asked whether the IEC is ready to implement overseas voting for registered South Africans as mandated by a recent Constitutional Court ruling, Bam responded to the Charge without hesitation, "We are on top of it." Bam said the IEC will increase the number of ballots to South African embassies overseas, but would not speculate on the number of overseas votes expected to be cast in light of the ruling. Registered overseas voters have until March 21 to inform the IEC of their intention to vote. Based on this information, ballots will be sent via diplomatic pouch to overseas missions. Overseas voting will take place on April 17, and the absentee votes will be counted along with the in-country votes starting on April 22 after polls close at 9:00 p.m.

¶6. (C) Bam told the Charge that in past elections, polling stations had to make due with partial paper lists comprised of the voter rolls for municipalities and provinces. With the 2009 election, poll workers in each polling station will have access to the 23.2 million list of voters on a computer zip drive, which will allow registered voters to vote on the national list from any polling station in the country. Offering background on how the IEC developed, Bam said that as a new democracy, South Africa had the luxury of models to choose from in developing the IEC, adding that some IEC features are borrowed and adapted from the Australian and Canadian systems. Bam said that votes will be counted manually at each polling station. Local results will be sealed and transported to central counting stations where they will be opened in the presence of auditors and party representatives. The counting stations have systems in place that will check for anomalies, such as a 100 percent turn out, or greater, at a polling station. After this, the results will be sent to the Results Center in Pretoria. IEC officials speculate that results may not be known for several days as the IEC conducts its counting. One IEC official told Poloffs in early March that it could be two days before all QPoloffs in early March that it could be two days before all the results have been counted and verified; he speculated that all counting would be completed at the latest by April

¶27. The next South African president will be inaugurated on May 9, after the newly elected Parliament convenes in Cape Town. Bam said she expected results 3-4 days after the election. The IEC officials told us that votes from Robben Island are typically the first to be tallied due to the relatively small number of votes, making the site of Mandela's former prison cell the Dixville Notch of South Africa.

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